



**United States Department of Justice  
United States Attorney's Office  
District of Minnesota**

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# **News Release**

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## **2 sentenced for identity theft**

Two Ramsey residents were sentenced yesterday in federal court in connection with a scheme to steal mail in order to obtain the identification of others and use those identities to money from financial institutions.

On Sept. 2 in Minneapolis, United States District Court Judge John Tunheim sentenced Shane Martin Kristianson, 29, to 54 months in prison and three years of supervised release on one count of conspiracy to possess and use, without lawful authority, the identification of others to execute a scheme to obtain money from financial institutions by false and fraudulent pretenses.

Judge Tunheim also sentenced Sarah Marie Westfall, 29, to 51 months in prison and three years of supervised release on one count of conspiracy. Both defendants were charged on Sept. 26, 2008, and pleaded guilty on Oct. 15. Both defendants also were ordered to pay \$57,671.21 in restitution.

According to their plea agreements, they admitted that from August 2006 through July 2007, they stole blank checks, endorsed checks, account information and identification documents from various victims' mail boxes, vehicles and other locations. They then used those items to produce bogus and counterfeit checks to defraud merchants, banks and other financial institutions out of more than \$50,000 in cash, goods and services. In all, more than 50 people and institutions in Minnesota were victimized.

A U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) affidavit states that authorities began investigating Kristianson and Westfall in July 2007. The affidavit also notes numerous victims here in Minnesota, although victims were found in South Dakota and Washington too. There, as here, Kristianson and Westfall stole mail and cashed or attempted to cash counterfeit checks at merchants and financial institutions as they moved from town to town. They were arrested in July 2008 in Washington.

In taking this case, the U.S. Attorney's Office hoped to prosecute through one court action

criminal conduct that spanned a prolong period of time and affected many communities and states. Following today's sentencing, U.S. Attorney B. Todd Jones said, "We are gratified for the sentences in this case and realize they are due, in large part, to the cooperation and dedication demonstrated by the numerous law enforcement agencies involved at all levels and in many jurisdictions."

This case was the result of an investigation by the USPIS, the Minnesota Financial Crimes Task Force and the Mille Lacs County Sheriff's Office. It was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas M. Hollenhorst.